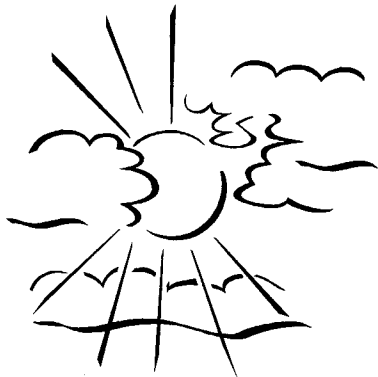


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

TOPIC	PAGE
*Energy Assistance	2-19
*Domestic Violence	20-22
Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	23-25
Juvenile Justice	26-27
Health Care	28-30
Vulnerable Adults	31-32
Food Assistance	33
Homelessness	34
Unemployment	35
Same-Sex Benefits	36-37
Office of State Employer	38
State Employee Blood Drive	39-40
Poverty	41-44
This Week in Washington	45-47

State moves to keep heat on this winter

October 19, 2005

BY ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

With Michigan residents facing nearly 50% higher heating bills this winter, proposed rules would make it tougher for utilities to shut off customers' light and heat -- crucial protection for seniors and people with low incomes.

The Michigan Public Service Commission's proposal includes extended due dates for utility bills, an end to shutting off service based on estimated bills and a cap on mandatory payments.

"With the alarming increases in energy costs since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Michigan's electric and natural gas customers face dire circumstances this winter," commission Chairman Peter Lark said Tuesday. "The emergency rules we established today will help soften the economic blow that residential and business customers will soon face."

In a departure from the agency's traditional regulatory role, the MPSC staff tried to determine ways to help soften the economic blow for residential and commercial customers this winter.

"Certainly, under no circumstances should someone's utilities be terminated, especially any longtime customers," said Gottfried Brieger, 69, of Huntington Woods, a retired chemistry professor. John Berousek, 57, a retired therapist from Waterford, said:

"That's the first I've heard of it, but I find it commendable. It's a good idea."

From Nov. 1 to March 31, utilities will no longer be able to automatically charge a late fee or shut off service based on an estimated bill. Instead, the company must conduct an actual meter read before submitting a final shutoff notice.

The new rules would also prevent utilities from cutting off service to customers who are 65 or older or whose household income doesn't exceed 200% of the poverty level. To qualify, those customers would have to pay a monthly amount that is equal to 6% of the household's estimated annual bill.

A typical monthly heating bill for a Michigan household is expected to go from an average of \$140 a month to nearly \$200 a month, according to the MPSC's Energy Appraisal report released last week.

The federal poverty level for a family of four in 2005 is \$19,350. Meanwhile, there were 16,000 low-income households in Detroit whose utility services were turned off at this time last year.

Emergency energy rules

The Michigan Public Service Commission, anticipating high energy costs this winter, is proposing several changes to the rules that utilities must follow when collecting fees from customers:

- Extend the due dates for all utility service bills from 17 days to 22 days for residential customers and from 21 to 22 days for businesses.

- Utilities can't shut off service or charge a late fee to customers based on estimated bills. Any change in service must be based on an actual meter reading. The current rule allows for shutoffs and late-payment fees on estimated bills.

- The mandatory monthly payment for electric or gas customers cannot exceed \$50 plus the amount of the customers' monthly electric and gas bills. Under current rules, there is no cap.

- Utilities cannot cut off service to a residential customer who is at least 65 years old or someone whose household income does not exceed 200% of the poverty level. The customer must pay a monthly amount equal to 6% of his or her estimated annual bill. Under current rules, the limit is 150% of the poverty level and a 7% payment of an estimated yearly bill, plus a portion of any past due bill is required.

- The utility cannot require a deposit unless the customer's service was turned off for nonpayment during the prior 12 months. Under the proposed rule change, a customer deposit cannot exceed the average monthly bill. The current rules state a deposit can't be more than twice the average peak-season monthly bill for residential customers.

Source: Michigan Public Service Commission

The cost of natural gas for the upcoming season is expected to average 46% more than it did last year, due largely to damage to facilities in the gulf coast region from Katrina and Rita.

Michigan's electricity bills are expected to increase by nearly 3% this year.

"This isn't going to solve the problems of the world," Lark said. "But it takes it a step further to help customers address what will definitely be a tough winter."

Blaming rising energy costs on Rita and Katrina, DTE Energy Corp.'s MichCon and CMS Energy Corp.'s Consumers Energy asked the MPSC on Oct. 3 to increase monthly natural gas bills by \$40 to \$60 during the winter to recoup their expenses. The MPSC is expected to grant those requests. The new rates would be effective Jan. 1.

"We will comply with the commission's order and the new rules," said Jeff Holyfield, a spokesman for Consumers Energy. "They are acting in response to the sharply higher natural gas prices and we share the commission's concern for helping customers in need. No one in Michigan should have to go without heat, because help is available."

The proposed rule changes must now go to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and then to the State Office of Administrative Hearings and Rules and to the Legislative Service Bureau for their approvals.

"The MPSC is doing a good thing," said Robert Chapman, executive director of the Warm Training Center, a Detroit nonprofit agency. "But it's only good if we act to make sure that next winter isn't going to be even worse."

Contact ALEJANDRO BODIPO-MEMBA at 313-222-5008 or bodipo@freepress.com. Staff writer Amber Hunt-Martin contributed to this report.

Published October 19, 2005

New rules aim to help people with heating bills

Changes expected to gain approval from Granholm

By David Eggert
Associated Press

Michiganians will get an extra five days each month to pay their energy bills this winter and more people will be shielded from having their heat shut off under emergency measures taken Tuesday by state regulators.

The Michigan Public Service Commission approved a number of rules aimed at helping people cope with high heating bills caused primarily by disruptions to natural gas production in the hurricane-ravaged Gulf of Mexico.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm is expected to approve the rules, which take effect Nov. 1 and make the following changes:

- The due date for gas or electric bills can come no earlier than 22 days after the bills have been sent to customers. The current due date is 17 days for residents and 21 days for businesses.
- Utilities can't shut off service to residents who are at least 65 or whose household incomes don't exceed 200 percent of the poverty level - \$38,700 for a family of four - as long as the customers pay a monthly amount equal to 6 percent of their estimated annual bills. The existing rule now applies only to those making less than 150 percent of the poverty level and requires them to pay a monthly amount equal to 7 percent of their annual bills.
- Customers who owe money to utilities can't be required to pay more than \$50 a month toward their debts, plus the amount for their current electric and gas bills. There is no cap on debt settlements now.
- Utilities can't require a deposit from customers unless they have been shut off for nonpayment in the last year. The deposit also can't exceed the customer's average monthly bill. The current rule allows deposits for 17 different reasons and lets utilities charge businesses a three-month deposit.

The new rules will last for six months.

Peter Lark, chairman of the Public Service Commission, said Michigan consumers face dire circumstances this winter.

The average residential natural gas bill in the state could increase 46 percent, from \$128 to \$187 a month, according to the commission. Eighty percent of Michigan households use natural gas for heat. Fuel oil costs also will rise significantly.

Regulation changes address rising energy costs

The Michigan Public Service Commission approved several new rules aimed at helping people cope with this winter's expected high heating bills. The rules, which would be in effect for six months, include:

- The due date for gas or electric bills can come no earlier than 22 days after the bills have been sent out.
- Utilities can't shut off service to residents who are at least 65 or whose income doesn't exceed 200 percent of the poverty level.
- Customers who owe money to utilities can't be required to pay more than \$50 a month toward their debt, plus the amount for their current electric and gas bills.
- Utilities can't require a deposit unless a customer has been shut off for nonpayment in the last year.

October 18, 2005

P.S.C. APPROVES LOW-INCOME GRANTS, EMERGENCY BILLING RULES

The state's natural gas companies are facing cost increases, which they will be passing on to customers. The Public Service Commission approved Tuesday emergency rules that would control how those increases are collected as well as grants to help low-income customers meet those increases.

Meanwhile, Attorney General Mike Cox said the hikes in gas costs do not justify proposed hikes to customers.

The commission, in its proposed emergency rules, gave customers more time to pay their heat bills and frees them from late charges or shut-offs based on estimated bills.

The rules (case No. 14668), which still must be approved by Governor Jennifer Granholm and the Legislative Service Bureau as meeting the criteria for issuing emergency rules, would require at least 22 days between a statement date and its due date, up from the current 17 days.

Utilities also would not be able to shut off power for a late payment based on estimated usage unless the customer is also then late on a subsequent bill based on a meter read.

For customers reaching settlements to repay overdue bills, the payment for the past due portion cannot be more than \$50.

The PSC also approved (case No. U-13129) \$41 million in Low-Income and Energy Efficiency Fund grants. The largest portion, \$26.5 million, went to the Department of Human Services for the State Emergency Relief Program and service restoration efforts.

The Michigan Community Action Agency Association and The Heat and Warmth Fund each received \$4.5 million for energy assistance programs, though \$500,000 to the MCAAA would be used to match its Walk for Warmth project.

The commission also ordered its staff (case No. U-14667) to make recommendations on energy efficiency programs that could be implemented or improved in the state based on programs here and in other states. The report is due January 17.

Mr. Cox, in filings made Monday, argued the gas companies could recover their losses from spiking gas prices more slowly avoid nearly doubling gas costs in some areas. State law requires that natural gas companies collect enough on the energy portion of gas bills to cover the cost of the commodity without providing them a profit.

Under Mr. Cox's proposal, the utilities would recover recent gas price spikes over 12 months rather than four as they have proposed and would wait to implement those increases until April.

Utilities have proposed increases of between \$42 and \$109 per month beginning as early as December. Mr. Cox said his plan would cut those increases to between \$10 and \$25 per month. The delayed implementation would also push those higher bills into the summer.

"To impose this high monthly rate increase on the working people of this state is appalling and to assess such a dramatic increase during the expensive winter heating season is unacceptable," Mr. Cox said. "That is why I have proposed a plan that would significantly cut the expected monthly rate increase."

MPSC Adopts Emergency Billing Rules

Reacting to the spike in energy costs since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) today established emergency billing practices for retail customers of electric and gas utilities under the Commission's jurisdiction.

Under the emergency rules scheduled to take effect Nov. 1 and continue through March 31, 2006, the due date for all utility service bills cannot be less than 22 calendar days from the date the bill was transmitted. The current rule is 17 days for residential customers and 21 days for businesses.

In addition, a utility is prohibited from shutting off service or charging a late payment fee for failure to pay an estimated bill by the due date unless the customer is subsequently delinquent. Currently, shutoffs and late payment fees can occur for nonpayment of estimated bills.

Other emergency rules include:

- A required monthly payment for an electric or gas bill cannot be more than \$50
- Service cannot be shutoff to customers 65 years or older or whose household income is 200 percent of the poverty level or less, as long as the customer pays 6 percent of his or her monthly bill
- A deposit cannot be required of a customer unless that customer has been shutoff for nonpayment during the previous 12-month period. A customer's deposit cannot exceed the average monthly bill.

The rules have been sent to Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM**, who must sign them before they can take effect.

Energy Efficiency Programs Under Review

In its continuing efforts to respond to the increase of natural gas prices, the Commission today directed the MPSC staff to prepare an overview of electric and natural gas energy efficiency programs in Michigan and elsewhere and made recommendations to the Commission by Jan. 17, 2006. Upon receiving the report, the MPSC will then hold public hearings to review the findings and develop a course of action.

In ordering the review, the Commission noted that Michigan remains vulnerable to increases in energy costs because its many industries rely on imported natural gas and because 80 percent of Michigan households use natural gas for space heating.

Low-Income Energy Grants Awarded

The MPSC awarded \$41 million in Low-Income and Energy Assistance Fund grants to seven organizations, with the biggest chunk (\$26.525 million) going to the Department of Human Services (DHS) for the Emergency Relief program and to restore energy services once they're disconnected.

The Michigan Community Action Agency Association (MCAAA) received \$3 million for low-income direct energy assistance, \$1 million for deliverable fuels programs for low-income households, and \$500,000 to provide a two-to-one match for funds raised locally through the Walk for Warmth project

The Salvation Army was awarded \$4.5 million to serve households statewide that are ineligible for

assistance from the Department of Human Services (DHS) or for whom such assistance is insufficient or not available.

The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW) received \$4.5 million for the THAW LI/EE program.

Newaygo County was awarded \$500,000 to assist clients in a 10-county area ineligible for the State Emergency Relief Program or for who such assistance is insufficient or would not be available in time to avert an emergency.

The Downriver Community Conference received \$275,000 for energy assistance to low-income households in the Monroe and southern Wayne County areas.

Lighthouse Emergency Services was awarded \$200,000 to assist clients in the Pontiac and Oakland County areas who are ineligible for assistance from DHS or for who such assistance is insufficient or would not be provided in time to avert an emergency.

Upper Peninsula 2-1-1 Service Designated

UPCAP Services, Inc., has been designated by the MPSC as the 2-1-1 community resource information and referral answering point for the 15 counties in the Upper Peninsula.

As a result of today's order all providers of basic local exchange service within the UP's 93 exchanges must allow their customers to access UPCAP Services through the use of the 2-1-1 telephone number.

Detroit Edison Expenses Under Review

The Detroit Edison Company must file a report with the MPSC by Dec. 1 explaining why its administrative and general expenses are "significantly higher than levels incurred by other large electric utilities."

The expenses, according to the Commission, include salaries of utility officers, property insurance, outside services, as well as pensions, benefits, and miscellaneous expenses.

Grand Rapids Press

October 19, 2005

Commission offers heating bill relief

Consumers may get an extra five days to pay their utility bills this winter.

The Michigan Public Service Commission on Tuesday established emergency billing practices from Nov. 1 through March 31 for retail customers of electric and gas utilities under the state's jurisdiction.

"This would increase the number of people who are eligible for the winter protection plan, and it also allows people five more days to pay their bills," MPSC spokeswoman Judy Palnau said. "So, it would prevent shut-offs during that most vulnerable period."

With heating bills projected to average \$59 a month higher than last year, every little bit could help.

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Heating bill help is on way

Michigan proposes 'emergency rules' to give homeowners more time to pay utility bills as natural gas costs climb.

By Nick Bunkley / The Detroit News

Michigan residents, bracing for brutal winter heating bills, may get more time to pay their utilities, more protection against shutoffs or a temporary reprieve from rate hikes under new proposals by state officials.

While the changes would make it easier for residents to keep warm, no one has found a way to spare homeowners from paying an average of \$1,298 for natural gas in the next year, a nearly 40 percent jump brought on by recent hurricanes and rising demand.

New billing rules established Tuesday by the Michigan Public Service Commission would give consumers five more days to pay their utility bills and protect more senior citizens and low-income residents from shutoffs during the five coldest months. Additionally, utilities could not charge late fees or disconnect customers for failing to pay a bill based on an estimate instead of an actual meter reading. The changes go to Gov. Jennifer Granholm and several other state officials for approval.

Estimated bills are a sore spot with customers like Dot Cohn, who said Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. usually guesses her monthly usage. She calls in the actual reading after receiving each bill to avoid being overcharged.

"Sometimes when they estimate it," said Cohn, of Grosse Pointe Park, "they have decided for no reason at all that I'm going to use twice as much as I did the year before."

The new "emergency rules" also would bar utilities between Nov. 1 and March 31 from shutting off service to customers age 65 or older and low-income customers, provided they pay at least 6 percent of their estimated annual bill each month. "Anything that we can do to give customers an easier way to handle the higher prices or eliminate some of the sticker shock, I think we've got to do," said public service commission Chairman J. Peter Lark.

Meanwhile, Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox has proposed freezing natural gas rates until the spring, when usage is lower. Cox wants the state's four largest gas providers to dilute the increases they have requested, adding \$10 to \$25 to monthly bills for a year rather than \$42 to \$102 from January to March. "To assess such a dramatic increase during the expensive winter heating season is unacceptable," Cox said.

At the Capitol, state Rep. Jim Marleau, R-Lake Orion, plans to introduce a bill eliminating the 6 percent sales tax on heating bills.

This week, Democrats in the state House and Senate proposed forbidding utilities from shutting off low-income customers' heat in the winter, offering tax breaks to residents who make their homes more energy efficient and making more payment assistance available. Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and several other states imposed a moratorium on winter utility shutoffs.

Michigan residents can expect to pay 46 percent more this winter to heat their homes, according to projections by the public service commission, which regulates utilities. The average bill between November and March is expected to jump \$59, from \$128 last year to \$187 this winter. That compares to \$88 in 2002 and \$114 in 2003.

Consumers Energy, which has 1.7 million customers in Detroit's northern suburbs and other parts of the state, has asked for permission to raise its gas-cost recovery rate from 62 cents per hundred cubic feet last winter to 91.1 cents in January. For a home that uses 16,000 cubic feet, a typical amount during the five-month winter season, monthly bills would rise 35 percent, from \$133 to \$179.

MichCon, whose 1.2 million customers include Detroit residents, requested an increase from 66.2 cents per hundred cubic feet last winter to \$1.31 in January. Monthly bills for a typical home would rise 77 percent, from \$138 to \$245. The increases won't give the utilities any additional profit. State law requires natural gas providers to charge customers wholesale prices, without a markup.

Soaring demand for natural gas, which is increasingly used to run power plants, and hurricane damage to facilities in the Gulf of Mexico has caused prices for natural gas to more than double in the past year.

Consumers Energy officials were still analyzing Cox's proposal to delay the rate hikes until April 1, but MichCon spokeswoman Lorie Kessler said it could make the problem worse. Utilities would have to pay more in interest, and if gas prices keep rising into 2006, even larger increases could be in store.

"We recognize that it's going to be a challenging winter for our customers," Kessler said. "We share the attorney general's concern; however, we question whether an extension of the recovery is a good idea. Ultimately the customers could be faced with even larger bills when the winter heating season ends."

Public service commissioners will consider Cox's proposal in the coming weeks as they review the utilities' requested rate hikes.

Among the changes commissioners proposed Tuesday:

- The due date for residential utility bills must be at least 22 days after it's sent out, up from 17 days.

- Settlement agreements on past-due bills are capped at \$50 a month plus the current bill amount.
- Families with household income below 200 percent of the poverty level -- \$38,700 for a family of four -- qualify for their utility's winter protection plan. The program ensures heat won't be shut off from November through March if they make minimum payments. Current regulations require higher payments, exclude November and limit income to 150 percent of poverty.

"People between 150 and 200 percent of poverty are going to be in trouble this year," said Kathy Walgren, executive director of The Heat and Warmth Fund.

The Public Service Commission on Tuesday approved \$41 million in grants to THAW and six other organizations that help residents who can't pay their utilities. THAW received \$4.5 million, the same amount it had last year. Given the dramatic increase in natural gas prices, Walgren expects the funding to run out even faster this year.

You can reach Nick Bunkley at (313) 222-2293 or nbunkley@detnews.com.

Cox Proposes Plan To Reduce Winter Heating Bills

Attorney General Mike **COX** has filed testimony before the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) challenging proposals by Consumers Energy, Michigan Consolidated Gas, Aquila, and SEMCO Energy to increase monthly winter heating bills by \$42 to \$102 per month.

These potential increases affect 99 percent of all natural gas customers in the state.

"To impose this high monthly rate increase on the working people of this state is appalling and to assess such a dramatic increase during the expensive winter heating season is unacceptable," said Cox. "That is why I have proposed a plan that would significantly cut the expected monthly rate increase."

In testimony filed Oct. 17 before the MPSC, (Case Nos. U- U-14400, 14401, 14402, 14403) Cox proposed a plan for the four utilities to recover the increased natural gas costs resulting partly from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita over a 12-month period versus a four-month period, as the utilities proposed.

Cox's proposal would also delay the start of the rate increases until April 1, 2006, when the expensive winter heating season is over. It's estimated that under Cox's proposed plan, monthly gas bills would only increase by \$10 to \$25, as opposed to the \$42 to \$102 proposed by the four utilities.

Cox's press release on the topic said his proposal "continues Attorney General Cox's aggressive approach of challenging utility rate increases on behalf of Michigan consumers and businesses."

Cox claims that in 2004, his Consumer Protection Division helped stop more than \$400 million in utility rate increases."

PSC urging citizens to ‘winterize’ houses

By Roland Stoy/Staff Writer

Coldwater Daily Reporter

October 18, 2005

LANSING — The Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) is urging citizens to do what they can do to hold down high heating bills this winter, and Gov. Jennifer Granholm has put natural gas suppliers on notice the agency will be watching their rates closely.

The MPSC suggests turning down the thermostat during the workday, putting in energy efficient windows or installing caulk or weather stripping along windows and door frames. Putting plastic sheeting over windows may also help keep out the cold. They also said those who heat with electricity may also receive higher bills, because many power plants run on natural gas.

Teresa Yohe, Community Action Agency (CAA) coordinator in Branch County, said she is having those who seek energy assistance also apply for state weatherization grants.

Lawmakers propose ban on utility shut-offs

October 17, 2005 - 6:15PM

BATTLE CREEK (NEWS 3) – Home heating costs are expected to increase by an average of 46 percent this winter, according to the Michigan Public Service Commission.

Today, democratic lawmakers asked utility companies not to shut off heat to homes during the winter - whether homeowners can afford it or not.

Gas bills are expected to be an average of \$59 more a month this winter. Proposed legislation would ban utility shut-offs between December and March.

Battle Creek resident Allen Firestein is preparing his house in anticipation. "Think ahead or you're going to be left behind," he says.

Firestein is disabled and, with just his fiancée's income, money's tight. "My fiancée already told the kids that it's going to be a little colder this winter because the gas prices are so high. We're not going to run the furnace that much," he says.

In Lansing Monday, democratic lawmakers announced legislation that would stop utilities from turning off the heat, even when the bill can't be paid. "We have a crisis that will be emerging this winter and we need to

address the home heating cost this winter," said Rep. Dianne Byrum (D-Onondaga).

The proposal would give residents a tax deduction for winterizing their homes and set aside more money for heating assistance program.

State Representative Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek) says he'd be interested in working with the democrats.



Democrats Unveil Heating Assistance Plan

Lori Dougovito, WILX-TV

October 18, 2005

Expanding and bolstering the state's heating assistance programs, that's what House and Senate Democrats are aiming for with a package of bills unveiled Monday morning.

It's called the W.A.R.M. plan or Winter Assistance and Relief for Michigan. A few of it's highlights are winter shut off protection for low income households, a weatherization tax deduction and also an income tax check off box for donations. Democrats say it's a plan Michigan can afford even though the budget was just recently balanced and the W.A.R.M. plan wasn't part of it.

The Republicans are also trying to help those coping with high heating bills. Last summer, House Republicans approved more than \$100,000,000 worth of federal funding for low income assistance.

Katrina portends bad news for area

Give George A. Schreiber Jr. points, if nothing else, for being honest. Recently Schreiber, who serves as president and chief executive officer of the Port Huron-based SEMCO Energy Co., granted an interview to The Daily Mining Gazette where the prices of natural gas, among other related issues, were discussed.

What he had to say was eye opening, if not shocking. Everyone knows that natural gas, long considered among the cheapest ways to heat one's home, school or business, is going to cost more during the coming heating season.

That's due, in large measure, to the damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina, and, to a lesser extent, other influences, Schreiber said.

What, perhaps, natural gas users didn't realize, is just how much more they are going to dole out to keep warm this winter.

According to Schreiber, Michigan residents using natural gas can expect to pay about 46 percent more this winter than last. And that's the good news. The rest of the country will pay 71 percent more this year than last.

Schreiber noted that the state of Michigan has a great deal of underground storage space - interestingly, abandoned salt mines, of all places - and that the easy storage capacity contributes to the state having the ninth lowest natural gas prices in the nation.

For the record, we appreciate Mr. Schreiber's candor. People outside of the news business might be surprised just how hard it is to get top executives like Schreiber to sit still long enough to ask them tough questions, never mind getting straight answers. His were straight and to the point.

Having said that, the difference between a 46 percent price hike compared to a 71 percent increase reminds us a little of the difference between having mumps and measles, back when folks were commonly stricken with those illnesses: Both were miserable but mumps, perhaps, somewhat less so.

We wonder if natural gas prices will revert back to their "pre-Katrina" levels at some point in the future, or will a new baseline cost be established? (That's what happened with gasoline, you know). Somehow, we suspect it will be the latter and not the former.

We believe we speak for Copper Country residents, indeed people everywhere, when we say that such price increases, no matter what the stated reason, are outrageous and indefensible. In a land of plenty, where farmers are paid to not plant fields, where huge sums are invested in military endeavors of one type or another, where every spending bill to leave Congress is drenched in pork, people are going to be cold and hungry this winter.

And that is an outrage that should cut across political, gender, racial and religious boundaries.

Published October 19, 2005

'Walk a Mile in These Shoes'

Display testifies to domestic abuse

Lansing State Journal

Four hundred eighty-nine pairs of shoes - 234 women's and 255 children's - but numbers alone fall short of showing the impact of domestic violence in mid-Michigan, officials at EVE Inc. say. The agency, formerly known as the Council Against Domestic Assault, presented an exhibit of 489 pairs of shoes at the state Capitol on Tuesday, representing each woman and child sheltered at EVE's House during the group's last fiscal year.

"We need to educate the community about the prevalence of domestic violence," said EVE's Susan Shoultz of the display, entitled "Walk a Mile in These Shoes."

"We thought this display visually would let people see the women, children and everybody who is affected. It's different when you see a little pair of purple shoes or a little pair of baseball spikes."

Amanda Dubey, a Michigan State University graduate student who interned at EVE's House during the summer, helped to collect shoes for the display.

"I'm really passionate about this cause," Dubey said. "Domestic violence is one of the topics that is not always talked about. The shoe display is so visual; it's depressing to realize how many people are affected."

From Oct. 1, 2003, to Sept. 30, 2004, EVE's House provided 6,625 safe shelter nights to 489 women and children. EVE (End Violent Encounters) offers a 24-hour crisis line, counseling, support groups and several education programs.

Shoultz said the display's timing coincided with other events going on in October, which has been designated Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

The Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention and Treatment Board, part of the state's Department of Human Services, held a reception Tuesday at the Capitol for state legislators.

BRIEFS

L35 10119 3B

Oct. 27 event honors domestic abuse victims

a reading of 2004 domestic violence victims in Michigan.

Service providers, community members, civic organizations and survivors of domestic violence are invited to an evening to remember and honor victims and survivors of domestic violence.

The program starts at 6 p.m. Oct. 27 at Magdalena's Tea House, 2006 E. Michigan Ave. It will include speakers from domestic violence prevention agencies, a candlelight vigil and

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Deaths of parents unintentional, man says Deaths in Farmington Hills house fire was a 'careless mistake,' their son tells jury at his trial.

By Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- A Farmington Hills man charged with killing his elderly parents in a deliberately set fire earlier this year testified Tuesday that the deaths were unintentional and only resulted from his drinking and a "careless mistake."

Craig Cymes, 47, is charged with two counts of first-degree premeditated murder and arson in the Jan. 21 deaths of his father, Marion, 80, and mother, Mayetta, 77. The couple died inside their home on Pipers Lane after their son admitted sprinkling gasoline on the carpeting and then "flicking" a Bic cigarette lighter to shock his mother. An autopsy determined that both died of soot and smoke inhalation.

Cymes said he resorted to the drastic measure because he was frustrated by his mother during a "frantic" incident in which she thought her husband had died.

"She called me down (from his room) and said he was dead," Cymes told the jury before Oakland Circuit Judge Deborah Tyner. "She was screaming she wanted to die too. I said 'I know a way to solve all of this.' All I wanted to do was get her to be quiet."

Cymes said he ran to an attached garage and grabbed a can of gasoline and brought it into the room where his father was confined to a hospital bed and his mother slept on a couch. Cymes said about six to eight ounces of gasoline spilled in a circle on the carpeting.

"It would be as easy as this," Cymes testified he told his mother, pulling a cigarette lighter from his pocket in what he called an empty threat.

But when Cymes flicked the lighter, gasoline fumes ignited, filling the room with smoke, he said.

Cymes told the jury he attempted to carry his mother from the smoke-filled room but she refused to leave and told him to save himself.

Cymes, who is single, said earlier in the night of the fire he had picked up a pizza for his parents, then went up to his computer room where he drank about a dozen beers and sent Instant Messages to his 25-year-old son, Jason.

Cymes, the sole caregiver for his parents, said he had a good relationship with his parents and enjoyed chatting with them, watching TV, and listening to daily Bible tapes with them.

The trial was adjourned until Thursday, when attorneys will present final arguments to the jury. Defense attorney Larry Kaluzny has characterized the case as a terrible accident while assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Denise Brainard said Cymes deliberate actions were motivated by frustration and greed.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or mmartindale@detnews.com.

Michigan Report

October 18, 2005

HOUSE APPROVES CHILD ABUSE INVESTIGATION LIMITS

Child Protective Services workers would still have discretion to remove a child from a home for alleged abuse or neglect, but that removal would only be mandated if the child's injuries required medical treatment or hospitalization under legislation passed Tuesday by the House. The chamber also passed legislation creating tax abatements for warehouses and expanding the Michigan Economic Growth Authority credits.

The child protection bill, HB 4420, passed 104-4, is intended to prevent automatic removal of children where generally minor injuries have been alleged as a sign of abuse or neglect. Current law requires removal on any sign of injury to the child where there are allegations of abuse.

The bill would provide automatic removal only where the injury is serious enough to require medical treatment.

Under SB 798, passed 108-0, the MEGA Single Business Tax credits could be offered to rural businesses that have come under new ownership and are at risk of moving out of state. The business would have to provide at least 300 jobs in the community.

SB 175, passed 60-48, would allow local communities to grant industrial tax abatements for warehouse facilities. The bill was intended to allow particularly communities along the border to compete with Ohio and Indiana, where such abatements are already offered.

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Cause still sought for 3-year-old's death

Grand Rapids Press

JAMESTOWN TOWNSHIP -- Medical investigators are trying to determine whether it was a particularly bad flu strain that killed 3-year-old Aleighana Judge Tuesday morning.

Doctors at Spectrum Health Blodgett Campus performed an autopsy late Tuesday.

"It's not a meningitis case," said Paul Davison, a pathology assistant for the medical examiner's office. "It's nothing suspicious."

The family was told by the medical examiner's office that doctors are looking at type A influenza, possibly pneumonia or some other viral infection as the cause of death, Aleighana's aunt, Glori Miller, said today. They may not know definitively for several days, she added.

Aleighana's family gathered at her home Tuesday to try to cope with the loss.

"She just turned 3," Miller said. "She was a healthy little girl. She had all her immunizations."

Grand Rapids Press

October 19, 2005

Dismay with Greenville

I am writing to express my extreme dismay with the school system in Greenville. When I read the article regarding the "bus bully" in the Oct. 13 Press ("Accused bus bully charged with assault, hate"), I was also shocked that the bus driver did nothing to control the passengers. I find it next to impossible to believe that he/she was not aware that someone was inflicting bodily harm on a much younger passenger. When I attended Saranac High in the 1960s, we rode buses from the country into that town.

Our bus driver was always scanning us through his rear-view mirror, always with a somewhat menacing glance which we knew saw all of us and he transported us safely to our destination. How could this Greenville bus driver not see commotion of some kind going on? Is there no healthy, respectful fear of retribution with this kind of activity for students when they are riding school buses? Is no one safe?

The next thing you know, we will be reading about some kid jumping out of the emergency door to escape bodily harm. Not that far-fetched, I believe. Come on let's think about this one!

NOLA SHEPHERD/Grand Rapids

Bronson teen gets jail, probation

By Don Reid/Staff Writer
Coldwater Daily Reporter

COLDWATER — A Bronson teenager, with a juvenile sex conviction, will serve six months in jail and probation for three years, after he pleaded no contest to fourth degree, criminal sexual conduct (CSC).

Charles Miller, 17, claimed he was too drunk to remember what happened on March 27 in a Coldwater apartment with a 13-year-old girl.

Miller brought two bottles of vodka to the house — where another girl was babysitting — for a group to drink, court reports say.

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Teen boy arrested in Capac bombing

Port Huron Times Herald

CAPAC- Police have requested criminal charges against a 14-year-old village boy they said is responsible for setting off a pop-bottle bomb Monday morning outside Capac High School. Chief Raymond Hawks said the boy admitted responsibility for the incident after being identified by a witness.

The teen, a freshman at the school, has been suspended and could face felony charges including manufacturing an explosive device. His name was not released by police.

No one was injured, and no damage was done. The school was evacuated when someone heard the noise.

The Michigan State Police bomb squad performed a sweep of the school building and found nothing else suspicious. The bottle was turned over to the state police forensic lab in Sterling Heights for evaluation.

Capac police and fire officials checked other buildings on the school's campus to ensure no other dangerous materials were left there. None were found.

The school houses about 735 students in eighth through 12th grades. Classes were back to normal Tuesday.

Panelists criticize health-care costs

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

By Paula M. Davis

pdavis@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8583

The First Presbyterian Health Clinic offers free medical services to low-income people in the Kalamazoo area, and its director, Jane Zwiers, is used to hearing praise about what it provides for the area's poor.

But the compliments also pose ``just a major conflict in my mind," said Zwiers, one of four panelists at a discussion Tuesday night about health-care affordability in America and the nation's millions of uninsured.

Why is it that some must go to a free clinic where pills are donated and doctors volunteer at night?

And why do others in the same community have ready access to medical care at any time and never think about putting off treatment because of cost?

``The truth of the matter is, (free clinics are) a stop-gap," Zwiers said. ``Sustainable effort forever? I don't think so. ``If we all paid a little bit more in taxes, we'd probably lick this thing," she said to applause from the audience.

Universal coverage, paid for by everyone, was one of several points raised in Tuesday night's discussion, at Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Texas Township campus.

It was part of the college's monthlong forum on the theme ``Taking an Ethical and Affordable Approach to Health Care."

The KVCC community has been encouraged to read a book by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Tracy Kidder, who will be at the school discussing his book ``Mountains Beyond Mountains" on Monday and Tuesday.

It's the story of a physician's medical programs in Haiti and other Third World nations.

Officials invited leaders and thinkers in Kalamazoo to KVCC Tuesday talk about affordability issues here.

One of the panelists, Dr. Rockelle Rogers, said she's noticed a trend at the Family Health Center in recent years that she finds disturbing.

More and more of the 13,000 patients the clinic sees annually don't qualify for Medicaid and struggle to shoulder the cost of treatment on their own because insurance is a benefit their employers simply don't offer.

And they are workers, she said, not the unemployed.

``We've seen such a rise in that in the last two years. It's a real problem," said Rogers, the center's medical director.

That's troubling to someone like Rogers, who says affordable health care should be readily available to all, a ``right" of citizenship, particularly for a major world power like the United States.

``A healthy population should be considered a social good," said panelist Shirley Bach, assistant director of the Western Michigan University Center for the Study of Ethics in Society and a professor of philosophy.

``And the cost for care of the sick should be shared by all," she said.

Jennifer Praner, a student at WMU, attended Tuesday to learn more about such issues, but they had personal resonance, too.

The 25-year-old said \$75 a month is what stands between her and health insurance.

That would be a small amount for many to pay, but the sophomore, who recently moved to Michigan, said, "I just really can't afford it right now."

So Praner, who is in good health, expects she'll skip some of the exams and procedures that are suggested even for the young and healthy.

Praner is an example of why America's health-care industry needs change, says Dr. Richard Tooker.

Tooker, Kalamazoo County's chief medical officer and one of the panelists, preached the gospel of prevention and health promotion Tuesday night.

He said that between 30 and 32 percent of the uninsured are in Praner's age bracket, 18 to 25 years old. Early and sustained preventive care is ultimately what's going to reduce costs for everyone, he said.

Right now, Tooker said, more than 16 percent of the country's gross domestic product goes for "sick care."

There's a disturbing imbalance in the industry, he said. For every dollar spent, 1 cent goes to health promotion and prevention.

But when he talks to the power brokers about the problem, he said, prevention is a hard sell because it's a cost.

"They don't understand that prevention is not without cost. But believe me, it is so much cheaper than the alternative, paying for massive sick care," he said.

New service will care for sick kids Doctor plans to open Brighton facility where mildly ill children can stay while parents work.

By Lilly Evans / Special to The Detroit News

October 19, 2005

BRIGHTON -- Jill Rickard wanted to return full time to her engineering job last year a few months after her son, Davis, was born.

But Davis often was sick, so Rickard worked about three days a week in order to spend more time at home with him.

She and her husband, Jason, a senior project manager, said they were glad to hear about a new pediatrician's office, run by Dr. Mo El-Fouly, that will keep sick children for up to 11 hours a day while their parents work. The couple has another child, 4-year-old Jessica. Both kids are patients of Dr. El-Fouly.

"My husband and I are professionals," Jill Rickard said. "At our level, we are expected to be at work. Dr. Mo's clinic will be a nice back-up when grandma isn't available and we are out of sick days at work."

The service, called Dr. Mom's Helpers, will only accept kids who are mildly ill, such as those with asthma, ear infections or low fevers. It also will accept children with joint sprains, bone fractures and upper respiratory illnesses.

Children with contagious or other serious conditions are not accepted.

Depending on the child's condition, he or she can rest in a bed or do activities and homework, monitored by professionals while their parents work.

"Parents shouldn't have to destruct their whole day, run to urgent care and miss a day of work if their child has a mild illness," said Dr. El-Fouly, a pediatrician who previously worked for University of Michigan's Brighton Health Care Center.

Dr. Mom's Helpers, slated to open Oct. 31, will provide up to 11 hours of observation and medical care per day for children 6 months to 16 years old. The pediatric observation wing will be supervised by pediatricians, medical assistants and nurse practitioners.

The cost will be \$40 per hour, although there will be a \$25 per hour introductory rate with a four-hour minimum. The sick care isn't covered by insurance unless parents have funds from flex benefits. Dr. El-Fouly said he hopes employers will see that it's in their interest to contribute.

"The employer has the expense of absenteeism, reducing rank or the high cost of dismissing the employee and hiring and retraining a new person," the doctor said. "For the parents, the rates will be much less than a trip to urgent care, which can be from \$1,000 to \$1,600 a visit, and missing an unpaid day at work."

Dr. Mom's Helpers will open in a new pediatric center that also will house a regular pediatric office and a child psychiatry and attention deficit disorder clinic with counselors.

Dr. El-Fouly said it's better for sick children to get their care at home.

"I strongly believe that the best place for a mildly ill child is at home with one or both parents," he said. "However, when this ideal situation is not practical for any reason, the working parents now have the second-best place to have their child supervised and cared for by pediatricians and medical professionals."

October 19, 2005

ABUSE BILLS GET OK FROM SENIOR ADVOCATES, LONG-TERM CARE GROUPS

Everyone hired to work in assisted living or nursing homes might soon be fingerprinted and checked for a criminal history and made ineligible for hire because of certain crimes, if a package of bills taken up by a House committee on Tuesday are passed into law.

Under HB 5166, HB 5167 and HB 5168, the law would mandate that every type of adult foster care, nursing home or psychiatric facility screen its new hires through the Federal Bureau of Investigation's fingerprint database. Currently, the law only mandates that nursing homes screen employees who have been in Michigan for less than a year by using the State Police name check system.

At the testimony-only meeting of the House Senior Health, Security and Retirement Committee, representatives from the Michigan Home Health Association, the Michigan Assisted Living Association and AARP, among others, gave their support for the legislation.

Proponents of the bills said fingerprinting is essential because it will help catch convicted criminals who use aliases or steal identities to obtain jobs or commit crimes.

Those who are found to have a criminal history of or have substantiated complaints against them of abuse or neglect or fraud against a vulnerable person would be barred from working with seniors for life under the legislation.

People with most other types of felonies would be eligible to work after 15 years and those with misdemeanors after 10 years. People who have either type of conviction could appeal and make a case for why they should be able to return to an adult home setting after three years.

The legislation protects the information found in background checks by toughening the penalties for employers who disclose the private information.

Representative Gary Newell, (R-Saranac), one of the bills' sponsors, said the bills would align Michigan's law with other state's standards for protecting older citizens.

"Seniors are very vulnerable at this particular stage of life," he said. "It's time Michigan (follow other states) to provide security for these folks."

Teamed with several community partners, Jan Christensen, deputy director for Health Policy Regulations and Professions for the Department of Community Health, is engaged in a project funded by a \$5 million federal grant that has been testing many of the practices mandated by the proposed legislation.

Mr. Christensen said lawmakers must pass the legislation by March in order for the department to continue with the program, which promotes FBI screenings of employees who have contact with seniors at all long-term care facilities and will train about 11,000 adult care employees to recognize abuse and neglect.

He said passage of the bills would put Michigan in compliance with federal standards and would speed up the process of screening new hires, which can take up to 90 days.

The legislation also would prohibit burdening employers and employees with the price of background checks, which can get pricey, especially in light of high turnover at long-term care facilities. Instead, Medicare and Medicaid would cover the tab.

Cutting food stamps wrong

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

CLIO

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

JOURNAL READER

It would be a disgrace if the federal government continues with its plan to cut food stamps for the working poor, especially with as much money going to Iraq even before Hurricane Katrina.

L.L. Knorr Jr.

Clio

Kalamazoo Gazette

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

Reader appreciates articles on homeless

Just when I think that only Molly Ivins makes the Kalamazoo Gazette bearable -- so churchy and conservative, you give us something like the well-researched and written story on the local homeless. Thank you. Please congratulate the writer(s) for me.

Donna Treloar
Kalamazoo

Oct 19, 10:53 AM EDT

Michigan's unemployment rate drops to lowest rate in 3 years

By TIM MARTIN
Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Michigan's unemployment rate fell to 6.4 percent in September, the lowest rate in nearly three years, the state said Wednesday.

Michigan's September seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was the lowest since November 2002. The jobless rate in August was 6.7 percent. The rate has dropped sixth-tenths of a percentage point in the last two months, and is lower than the year-ago rate of 7.1 percent.

But the state's jobless rate remains well above the national average of 5.1 percent.

The improvement is partially attributable to laid-off auto workers returning to their jobs. The state gained 8,000 manufacturing jobs last month.

State officials say it's too early to tell if the better jobless rate signals a long-lasting improvement for the economy.

"We will need several more months of data to determine if this is a short-term occurrence, or a longer-term trend, especially given some of the challenges taking place in the automotive sector," Rick Waclawek, director of the state's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives, said in a statement.

Michigan added 4,000 government payroll jobs in September, according to a monthly survey of employers. Education and health services gained 3,000 jobs, while professional and business services added 2,000 jobs.

About 8,000 jobs were lost in trade, transportation and utility segments of the economy.

Overall, employment in Michigan rose by 36,000 in September.

The drop was good news for the state, which has seen its unemployment rate hover for more than a year over 7 percent, one of the worst rates in the nation.

But the state faces more challenges ahead, with auto supplier Delphi Corp. recently declaring bankruptcy and the Electrolux plant in Greenville shedding the rest of its 2,700 employees later this year as it moves its refrigerator plant to Mexico.

On the Net:

Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth: <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd>

Midland Daily News

October 18, 2005

Legislation is harmful

To the editor:

I am writing to respond to Sen. Mike Goschka's comment concerning domestic partner benefits where, as a "committed Christian," he called any homosexual union an "utter perversity." He further responded to a Tri-Cities PFLAG spokesperson that, while he would uphold the civil rights of these individuals, he did not agree with nor condone their "lifestyle."

Mr. Goschka is abolishing civil rights for children and adults in Michigan by supporting legislation that would remove negotiated health care benefits that were being provided by employers. Mr. Goschka needs to be honest with his constituents and explain why he is willing to sacrifice the health and welfare of children and adults in the State of Michigan in the name of his religion. Our nation has a philosophy of separation of church and state so that citizens of the United States would not suffer religious persecution. Mr. Goschka wants to impose his view of Christianity and his belief system on the people of Michigan, even though doing so will put the health of children at risk.

As a Christian and the proud father of a gay son, I am appalled at Mr. Goschka's comments. Apparently he does not share in Christ's teachings that we should not stand in judgment of our neighbors and that we should love our neighbors as ourselves. My Christian beliefs do not include harming people by taking away their civil rights.

I do not expect Mr. Goschka to embrace my religious views. He is free to believe what he wants to believe, but he should not be allowed to legislate his religious views or force them on those of us who believe differently and he should not be allowed to trample on the civil rights of a minority.

BOB MALOSH
Gladwin

Lansing State Journal

October 18, 2005

Cropsey is biased

I have followed state Sen. Alan Cropsey's personal attack on the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual community. I think his time would be better spent focusing on his own family, rather than obsessing about mine.

When my employers hired me, they expected me to eventually marry and reproduce. Due to his attack on my civil rights and his ability to persuade the frightened, misguided sheep about the GLBT community, my partner of over five years is not entitled to my benefits. This is discrimination in its highest form.

If he is a "good Christian" - and he states he is - then why is it he picks and chooses which of "God's laws" to follow or ignore?

I am sure Bob Jones University did not teach him that only some of "God's laws" are relevant and some aren't. It is for "God" to judge, not his followers!

Kristi Bartholomew
Bancroft

October 18, 2005

DAVID FINK TO RETURN TO PRIVATE PRACTICE

David Fink, director of the Office of State Employer since February 2003, will leave that post near the end of the month to return to private law practice. He told the Associated Press his practice will not be with his old firm, which no longer bears his name, but will be close to his home in West Bloomfield.

Mr. Fink led state negotiations on contracts with state employees that included a number of moves such as unpaid days off as he developed ways to cut \$230 million state payroll costs to help erase a state budget deficit. The initial negotiations at one point led to the state sending layoff notices to state employees when unions turned down the banked leave proposal, but the employees in the end accepted that option rather than an alternative plan that cut paid weekly hours to 37.5 from 40.

More recently, he was at the center of negotiations for same-sex benefits for civil service workers, an issue negotiated last year, but held up when voters approved a constitutional amendment defining marriage, which led to court battles over the impact the amendment has on benefits. An appeal is expected of an Ingham Circuit Court ruling which said the benefits are not dependent on marriage, but on a work relationship.

In addition to his private law practice, Mr. Fink was assistant corporation counsel for Detroit after his 1977 graduation from Harvard Law School, served on the state House ad hoc committee on revitalizing Michigan cities, the Michigan Environmental Response Act Citizens Review Board and the Environmental Law Section Council of the State Bar of Michigan, and was a member of a committee that reviewed federal court appointees that were forwarded to former President Bill Clinton.

He also was the 2002 Democratic nominee against U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg (R-Bloomfield Hills).

Published October 19, 2005

Thankful boy boosts blood drive

Liver recipient, 10, helps launch effort for state employees

By Hugh Leach
Lansing State Journal

Seth Sutherland wants others to have the second chance he was given.

The 10-year-old fifth-grader at St. Joseph School underwent a liver transplant last year that saved his life.

When the St. Johns boy and his parents were asked to help kick off a program aimed at increasing blood donations by state employees, he didn't hesitate.

"He's pretty excited about it," said his father, Robert Sutherland, who works for the Michigan Department of Corrections in Ionia.

Wearing a cap with the logo "State Employee Blood Challenge 2005-2006," Seth helped Michigan Surgeon General Kimberly-dawn Wisdom unveil a promotional poster Tuesday at the American Red Cross blood donor center in Lansing.

Seth, who was jaundiced and feeling tired, had tests at Sparrow Hospital last year and then was sent to C.S. Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor, Robert Sutherland said.

Within two hours, doctors determined his liver was failing. The problem was so severe that he was moved to the top of the list to receive a donated liver. A match was quickly found, and Seth received the transplant less than a week later, on Nov. 11.

"It happened so quickly we didn't have the opportunity to participate in a blood drive to help him," said his mother, Deb Sutherland, who works at the Clinton County clerk's office.

"Fortunately, we never had to be concerned with the availability of blood."

Seth, the youngest of the Sutherlands' four sons, still faces a few limitations but is leading a healthy, active life.

"I feel a lot better than I did a year ago," he said.

Two months after his surgery, he was cleared to play basketball. This summer, he played Little League baseball and hit his first home run.

"It felt really good," he said.

His father said Seth can play most sports.

"He probably won't be able to play football or hockey, and he knows that," Robert Sutherland said.

Seth's parents are both blood donors and have vowed to step up their efforts to encourage others to donate.

"It's quite a wake-up call when something like this happens close to you," Robert Sutherland said.

The new program aims to increase blood donations by 20 percent among the state's 55,000 employees.

Wisdom said 70 percent of the population is eligible to give blood, but only 5 percent of those actually do.

"Four million Americans need blood every year," she said. "That's about one every two seconds. Volunteer donors are the only source of blood products for hospital patients."

Blood challenge

- What: Partnership between the state of Michigan and Michigan's major blood collection agencies to promote blood donations by the state's 55,000 employees
- When: Nov. 1, 2005 to Oct. 31, 2006
- Where: Blood drives will take place at work sites and in various communities
- How: Prizes and entry into drawings for weekend getaways are available to donors.
- Goal: Increase blood donations by state employees by 20 percent
- Participants: State employees, American Red Cross Blood Services, Michigan Community Blood Centers, Upper Peninsula Regional Blood Center

On the Web

- www.michigan.gov/bloodchallenge

Contact Hugh Leach at 377-1119 or hleach@lsj.com.

County slips even deeper into poverty

Rate jumps 20% since 1999; heating costs will add to misery

PUBLISHED: October 18, 2005

By Chad Selweski
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Calling it an "incredibly alarming" report, officials were told Monday that poverty in Macomb County is on the rise, with the number of people receiving public assistance up 76 percent over the past 3 1/2 years.

The Macomb County poverty rate has jumped 20 percent since 1999, with 6.7 percent of the population living below the poverty line, but researcher Kurt Metzger warned that those numbers show only a piece of the picture. Rising unemployment, bankruptcies, cuts in wages and working hours and a lack of health insurance have all led to a shrinking middle class, Metzger said. An anticipated spike in home heating costs this winter could add to the misery for many families. "It's going to be a very difficult winter in the tri-county area," said Metzger, director of research for United Way for Southeastern Michigan. "The problem is getting worse and there's nothing on the horizon to suggest things will be getting better any time soon."

The report was presented to the county Board of Commissioners by Metzger and the Macomb County Community Services Agency, which has experienced a 17 percent increase in families seeking assistance over the past three months.

MCCSA Director Frank Taylor said demand is up for several programs that serve low- and moderate-income families: home-delivered meals for senior citizens, Head Start preschool classes, home weatherization projects, Dial-a-Ride bus transportation, and food assistance. Taylor said the food program aided more than 22,000 households over the past year, providing nearly 679,000 pounds of food, an increase of 100,000 pounds.

"We have seen a significant, significant rise in the levels of service," he said.

At the Department of Human Services, similar increases have been registered for welfare payments, Medicaid health insurance and subsidized child care.

All those services combined represent the 76 percent increase in public assistance since 2002, with 52,000 people relying on government help supplied through federal, state or county funding.

While Macomb's poverty rate ranks lower than most Michigan counties, the numbers are disturbing for officials who presided over a county that just six years ago was enjoying a booming economy that led to big household income increases and unemployment so low that worker shortages became commonplace.

Metzger said the number of families now seeking help demonstrates the gap between archaic federal guidelines for poverty -- set at \$18,850 for a family of four -- compared with an analysis of the "basic needs" of Macomb County families.

The basic needs includes the cost of food, housing, clothing, utilities, health care and transportation for a typical family. That amount has reached an average of \$3,211 a month, Metzger said, which requires a pay rate of \$19.27 for a full-time job.

That figure stunned some county commissioners, with one calling the report "incredibly alarming" and another commissioner saying he was at a loss for words.

"I think a lot of people would be surprised -- I don't know what word to use -- overwhelmed, shocked by your report," said Commissioner Brian Brdak, a New Baltimore Democrat.

Some of the key facts in the report and in Metzger's presentation:

From 2000 to 2003, the number of people in Macomb County receiving welfare payments rose 17 percent, food assistance jumped 99 percent, Medicaid rose 66 percent and child care assistance rose 44 percent.

The worst poverty rates prevail in four communities: Mount Clemens, 14.1 percent, Center Line, 13.3 percent, Memphis, 11.3 percent and Lenox Township, 10.1 percent. But a large number of poor people are found even in cities without low-income neighborhoods. Sterling Heights, for example, has nearly 6,500 people who live below the poverty line.

Those most likely to be living in poverty are children under the age of 6. Single-parent families are more likely to be poor than two-parent families. Lack of education or transportation are also factors. Minorities have higher poverty rates, though the gap between whites and blacks is shrinking. Substance abuse and mental health problems also lead to poverty.

Some families earning less than the income needed to cover basic needs -- less than \$38,539 for a family of three -- experience three types of hardships: missing meals due to a lack of food; eviction from their apartment; or postponing health care or surgery because of the out-of-pocket costs.

About one-fourth of county residents spend more than 35 percent of their income to pay rent and 15 percent spend more than half their paycheck on rent. The median rental cost in Macomb County is about \$600 a month.

Health care costs are becoming a greater financial factor for families as benefits are cut or eliminated. Some 75 percent of the uninsured work and 42 percent work full time.

Mortgage foreclosures are rising, with 2,300 since 2002. Metzger blamed a portion of that figure on "unconscionable" marketing of home loans that offer few upfront costs but eventually lead to financial troubles for many families.

From 2000 to 2004, Macomb County lost 23,000 manufacturing jobs, a 22 percent drop. The overall number of unemployed workers has reached a steady 27,000 to 28,000.

Commissioner Nicki Brandenburg, a Macomb Township Republican, said the solution to Macomb's poverty lies in greater charitable work by churches and more church-goers contributing "tithes" to their churches of up to 20 percent of their annual income.

But Commissioner William Crouchman said no amount of individual efforts can collectively solve the problem.

"We can't cure economic inequities through charity," said Crouchman, a St. Clair Shores Democrat.

"My (college-bound) children are very concerned that they will never live at the level that our family has lived at."

Hear 'cry of the poor,' city candidates told at forum

Wednesday, October 19, 2005

efinnerty@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8551

Candidates for Kalamazoo City Commission were grilled Tuesday on how they would solve problems confronting the city's poorest neighborhoods.

They didn't pretend to have all the answers, but many stressed a need for commissioners to better connect with residents in solving crime, poverty, racial discrimination and unemployment. Some suggested the commission hold more meetings in neighborhoods instead of at City Hall.

"As long as people feel disenfranchised, as long as they think the city doesn't care about them, they aren't going to be involved," said first-time candidate Geno Hinton, a mail carrier from the Edison neighborhood, during a forum on the city's north side.

Sixteen of the 17 candidates on the Nov. 8 ballot attended the 1-hour, 45-minute forum at the Northside Association for Community Development, sponsored by the Northside, Eastside and Stuart neighborhoods. Charles Young was the only candidate who did not attend.

Many of the questions posed by an audience of about 60 people revolved around how the commission can improve their quality of life, from creating jobs to keeping their streets safe.

"This commission has failed to hear the cry of the needy and the cry of the poor," said the Rev. Jerry McNeely, who described himself as "an agitator" who would challenge the status quo at City Hall.

Several candidates said the city should focus efforts to reduce poverty and create jobs by helping small, locally owned businesses grow. Incumbents Bobby Hopewell, Don Cooney, Sean McCann and David Juarez said the city should review its policies for granting tax breaks to businesses. Some candidates suggested companies be required to hire local workers in exchange for tax breaks.

Adding officers to the Department of Public Safety's community policing program, which has been beset by budget cuts in recent years, would help reduce crime, several candidates said.

Juarez suggested also bolstering volunteer block-watch programs.

Some residents wanted to know how candidates would address racial tensions that flared this year, including allegations of institutional racism in the Department of Public Safety.

"I don't think we can tolerate racism within the Department of Public Safety or any other department," Tim Birch said in response.

Hopewell said the city needs to communicate its record on affirmative action better, including whether it is meeting minority hiring and promotion targets.

The next public candidate forum is scheduled for 7 p.m., Oct. 26, at Western Michigan University's Fetzer Center.

Grand Rapids Press

October 19, 2005

Harmful dole

I am writing in response to the Rev. Bill Freeman's letter, "On the dole?" of Sept. 26 and his chiding of U.S. Senate candidate, the Rev. Jerry Zandstra.

People who do receive federal government entitlements are in fact "on the dole." The word dole is defined as a hand-out. People who depend solely on a government hand-out would have a propensity to loot due to the nature of government hand-outs. Government hand-outs discourage people to become self-sufficient and take away self-respect. Then when faced with a crisis like Hurricane Katrina where there is a disruption of government hand-outs, looting is in fact not surprising.

The bureaucratic nature of the federal government does very much explain why it was so slow in reaching the hurricane victims. Social entitlements and assistance should not be the job of the federal government. That's the job of the Christian church. In the hours after the hurricane, we saw that churches were very fast in responding.

The federal government has done a disservice to the Christian church by taking over social welfare programs. Taking care of the poor and serving people is supposed to be a primary job of Christians. The federal government's co-opting of that role has over the years made Christ's church sadly lazy and apathetic.

With regard to tax breaks for businesses, why shouldn't the federal government encourage business growth and commerce? The economic growth that businesses provide allows able-bodied people to get off the public dole and often results in local social investment.

BOB VerBURG/Caledonia

This Week in Washington

For the week ending 10/14/2005, Vol. XXVI, No. 36

- [HHS Releases TANF Emergency Program Instructions](#)
- [CMS Rule on Flu Shots for Long-Term Care Residents](#)
- [Worker Recovery Accounts Legislation Introduced](#)
- [ACF Releases FY 2006 LIHEAP Funds](#)
- [Bill Would Repeal Education Programs](#)
- [Senators Push Job Creation For Disabled People](#)
- [Bonuses for Out-of-Wedlock Birth Cuts and TANF](#)
- [Human Service Offices Get Hunger Champion Awards](#)
- [Grants Awarded for Mentoring Children of Prisoners Affected by Katrina](#)
- [Head Start Grant Will Fund Early Care And Education Activities](#)
- [This Week "Goes Electronic" Effective October 21](#)

HHS Releases TANF Emergency Program Instructions

On October 11, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) released two program instructions (PIs) to states on emergency procedures for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The first PI, TANF-ACF-PI-2005-06, presents states with items to consider with respect to serving Katrina evacuees through their current TANF program. For states that choose to serve evacuees through this option, OFA encourages them to consider a streamlined application process and has stated that it will not hold states to the time frame specified for verifying information through data matches. OFA will also provide states with flexibility in making immediate changes to eligibility criteria in advance of an updated state plan amendment. The instruction also covers work requirements and the waiving of state penalties. The second PI, TANF-ACF-PI-2005-07, outlines the key features of the TANF Emergency Response and Recovery Act, P.L. 109-68 (see *This Week*, September 23). In a question-and-answer format, the PI explains how states can draw down and reconcile contingency funds; what type of assistance can be provided; what is considered as "cash benefits"; and other information for implementation of the new law. Both PIs are available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/>.

CMS Rule on Flu Shots for Long-Term Care Residents

On October 7, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) published a final rule to require long-term care facilities to immunize their residents against the flu as a condition of participation in the Medicare and Medicaid Programs. The rule requires the facilities to immunize each resident against influenza annually and to provide a one-time vaccination against pneumococcal disease, unless contraindicated or refused by the resident or legal representative. The rule also mandates that long-term care facilities educate each resident or resident's guardian about the benefits and potential side effects of vaccination. CMS expects the regulation to increase the number of elderly receiving influenza and pneumococcal immunizations and decrease the rate of incidence and death from such diseases. The full text of the rule, which was published in the October 7 Federal Register (70 FR 58833-58852), is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

Worker Recovery Accounts Legislation Introduced

On October 5, Rep. Charles Boustany (R-La.) introduced the Worker Recovery Act (H.R. 3976), which would create worker recovery accounts of up to \$5,000 to help displaced Gulf Coast workers acquire job training and other key employment services. The bill is similar to the personal reemployment account pilot projects approved by the House as part of the Workforce Investment Act reauthorization bill, H.R. 27. The accounts could be used to acquire services such as employment counseling, job training, child care, uniforms, and transportation services. The

accounts would be personally managed funds targeted to help dislocated workers who are receiving Disaster Unemployment Assistance or Unemployment Insurance and likely to exhaust such benefits. The accounts would supplement available benefits such as unemployment compensation as well as core employment and training services offered through the Workforce Investment Act. Each account would be administered through the local one-stop system. If an account holder finds employment within 13 weeks of receiving an account, the balance of the account up to \$1,000 would be paid to them. The balance would be paid out in two installments of 60 percent at the time of employment and 40 percent after six months of retaining a job. The legislative language is available online at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. More information on the bill is also available at <http://edworkforce.house.gov/issues/109th/hurricane/factsheetwra100605.htm>.

ACF Releases FY 2006 LIHEAP Funds

On October 12, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) announced \$1.3 billion to help low-income families pay their heating bills. The funds are being sent to states as part of the fiscal year 2006 Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding. The funds are being administered under the current continuing resolution and represent a portion of states' total FY 2006 LIHEAP funds. The amounts follow \$27.25 million in emergency energy assistance the administration distributed to states hit hardest by Hurricane Katrina. A total of \$20.35 million in emergency LIHEAP funds remains available for crises. Individual state allotments are available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2005/liheap_assistance.htm.

Bill Would Repeal Education Programs

On October 7, Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio), chair of the House Education and the Workforce Committee, introduced a bill (H.R. 4018) to repeal and eliminate funding for 14 federal education programs. Boehner said the purpose of the bill, named the Setting Priorities in Spending Act, is to "cut federal spending to help offset the ongoing hurricane recovery and rebuilding effort." Total federal funding for the programs targeted for elimination was \$246 million in fiscal year 2005. FY 2006 funding for all the programs that would be repealed by H.R. 4018 were already targeted for elimination in the House version of the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations bill. The 14 programs that would be repealed by the bill include the Early Learning Opportunities Act grants, Ready to Learn TV, Community Technology Centers, Literacy Programs for Prisoners, Occupational and Employment Information, State Grants for Incarcerated Youth, and Parental Information and Resource Centers.

Senators Push Job Creation For Disabled People

On October 6, Senators Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) held a news conference to gain support for the Employer Work Incentive Act for Individuals with Severe Disabilities (S. 1570), a bill introduced last July to provide better incentives for employers to hire people with severe disabilities. The news conference was sponsored by the One Percent Coalition, which formed in July to encourage competitive employment for 1 percent (94,000) of people with severe disabilities. The legislation offers federal contracts to private employers whose workforce is composed of at least 25 percent people with severe disabilities in full-time positions and who contribute at least 50 percent of the total cost of the annual premiums for health insurance coverage for their employees. The measure also requires administrative agencies to give preference in contracting to such businesses. The bill's sponsors expect to save the federal government \$45 billion in Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income over 10 years. During the news conference, former Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.), who serves as co-chair of the coalition, and other speakers said the legislation could expand employment and lead to self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities while increasing taxable income.

Bonuses for Out-of-Wedlock Birth Cuts and TANF

On October 12, HHS announced awards to states for reductions in out-of-wedlock births and for high performance in the TANF program during FY 2003. Bonuses of \$25 million each were awarded to New York, Utah, and the District of Columbia for significant decreases in out-of-wedlock births. TANF High Performance Bonuses totaling \$200 million were awarded to 41 states and the District of Columbia. Awards are given to high-performing states in FY 2003 as well as states with the largest increase in specific performance categories over the course of the year. In the Job Entry category, Montana was the highest performer and South Carolina had the largest percentage point increase over last year. In the Success in the Workforce category, Idaho was highest performer and Oklahoma had the largest annual increase. Pennsylvania and Ohio had the highest performance and largest annual increase, respectively, for Medicaid enrollment. Maine and Alabama had the highest performance and largest annual increase, respectively, for Food Stamp Program enrollment. The District of Columbia was the highest performer in the category of child care subsidies, and Nebraska had the largest percentage annual increase in the category of family

formation and stability. More information is on the HHS web site at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/HPB/2003/hpb2003index.htm>.

Human Service Offices Get Hunger Champion Awards

On October 4, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) announced the first Hunger Champion awards, given to local FSP offices rated as providing the best customer service. The offices were nominated by local staff, anti-hunger advocates, program recipients, and others with first-hand knowledge of the offices' approaches to serving customers, providing program outreach, or improving the program's image in the community. Named as Hunger Champion Mentors were the Polk County (Iowa) Department of Human Services for its "extraordinary efforts to educate and assist eligible food stamp clients" and the Santa Cruz County (Calif.) Human Resource Agency for its "innovative approach to customer service and administering the FSP." Four additional offices were named as Hunger Champion Honorable Mentors: the Charlottesville (Va.) Department of Social Services; the Portland (Maine) Department of Health and Human Services; the Richmond City (Va.) Department of Social Services; and the West District of the Philadelphia (Pa.) County Assistance Office. The awards were announced at the annual conference of the American Association of Food Stamp Directors, an APHSA affiliate, in Greensboro, N.C. They were presented by Kate Coler, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) deputy undersecretary for food, nutrition, and consumer services, and Clarence Carter, FNS deputy administrator for the FSP. More information is available on the FNS web site at http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/pdfs/hunger_champions.pdf.

Grants Awarded for Mentoring Children of Prisoners Affected by Katrina

On October 13, the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families announced award of 28 urgent grants for mentoring services to children who were evacuated due to Hurricane Katrina. The grants, totaling about \$3.8 million, were awarded to grantees in Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Connecticut, California, Michigan, Missouri, Rhode Island, Texas, Louisiana, Nevada, Arizona, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Florida, New York, Washington, Vermont, North Dakota, and Kansas. Some funds will be used to reconnect or establish new mentoring relationships for children of incarcerated persons who were evacuated to new communities. The remaining funds will be used to provide training and technical assistance to the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program grantees. The announcement was published in the October 13 Federal Register (70 FR 59759-59760) and is available at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

Head Start Grant Will Fund Early Care And Education Activities

On October 13, the Head Start Bureau awarded \$600,000 to the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices to develop and implement new strategic early childhood plans. The NGA proposal indicates that the plans will address improving quality and coordination of early childhood care and education. Under the proposal, an audit of existing early childhood efforts in four states will be conducted; implementation recommendations will be provided to early childhood stakeholders; and findings and recommendations will be disseminated broadly. The announcement was published in the October 13 Federal Register (70 FR 59760).

This Week "Goes Electronic" Effective October 21

Beginning with the October 21 edition, TWIW will be provided to subscribers exclusively as an electronic publication. If you are a currently a subscriber to the paper edition, please forward your e-mail to Demetrius Williams at dwilliams@aphsa.org
